CHAPTER-6

CONCLUSION

After examining Deshpande’s treatment of the theme of determinism and free will and how it is expressed in her novels, an attempt will be made here to sum up the important findings arrived at during the course of this study. Deshpande’s fiction depicts the comprehensive and boundless world of human experiences that defies any rigid categorisation or formulation. She presents, with rare competence, a variety of human feelings, emotions, aspirations and behaviour. It emerges from the present study that she achieves this depiction of human life in its vastness by juxtaposing the contraries creating an element of tension and conflict in her novels. The tension caused by opposites comes out as a major thematic concern in her fiction. Almost every novel by her is invariably built around the conflict generated by these antagonistic forces constituting the reality of human life at different levels. She presents this element in various forms and dimensions – from the conflict within an individual, due to warring passions, pulls of thoughts and pressures of ideas, to the conflict arising between social demands and individual aspirations and the constant battle of man against God’s will or destiny.

One of the distinguishable features of Deshpande’s treatment of this phenomenon is her powerful depiction of the conflict between the individual’s physical self and rational self. If on the one hand, desires of the body assert themselves and demand their gratification, the moral self with its sense of right and wrong seeks to resist and overcome them. Like most of the other writers of modern times, she has depicted its impact not only on the life of an individual but on his/her relationship with others in the family and the society as well.

Among various aspects of the body, which seek to manipulate an individual, the one, which is presented by her in almost every novel, is the menstrual cycle of women. Puberty is a very crucial period in a teenager’s life. But this phase of physical changes and hormonal turmoil becomes all the more troublesome for a girl due to the onset of her monthly cycle. If at this stage, she is not carefully and cautiously informed about her sexuality and the fact that various developments taking place in her body are quite natural, it might lead to disastrous consequences,
which can thwart her growth into a physically, mentally and emotionally healthy individual. For instance, in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Saru’s inner turmoil when her periods began is graphically presented by Deshpande. She was blatantly introduced to her sexuality by her mother who also imposed various kinds of inhibitions on her. This works in her life as a powerful force insidiously controlling her responses and attitudes in life. It makes her form a negative attitude towards her body and she feels embarrassed by the physical changes in her. In another novel, Roots and Shadows, Indu’s resentment and acute self-consciousness caused by the bodily function of menstruation is clearly perceptible. As a result, she develops feelings of aversion to her womanly body and its feminine functions.

Also, one notices that Deshpande’s interest is not limited to presenting the feelings of resentment and abhorrence due to their bodily function but she at the same time reveals the deep impact that these feelings have on the mind and behaviour of her women. They tend to see their bodies as their adversaries and get alienated from their own physical selves because they see bodies as limiting agencies which close so many doors of opportunities on them. Being a woman becomes a torturous experience due to this function of their body. Indu’s apprehensions about motherhood and Jaya’s attempt to control her body by taking pills can be seen as an expression of the feelings of revulsion for their female bodies. Deshpande, thus in a very subtle and succinct manner reveals the devasting effects of the function of menstruation on attitudes and outlook of her women.

Besides the phenomena of menstruation, Deshpande also presents some thought-provoking insights about the hold of bodily urges and demands on an individual. The sexual desires come naturally and can have dire consequences when they are repressed or become over assertive. The fact that demands of body are hard to resist is conveyed very convincingly by the novelist in the novel, Moving On. Manjari’s instinctual decision to marry Shyam, against her parents’ wishes, can be attributed to the hormonal changes taking place in her young body. The carnal desires of this nineteen-year-old girl take hold of her mind and seek their fulfilment through her marriage with Shyam. Manjari thoughtlessly submits to the hungers of her body.
Later in life, when she is leading a widow’s life and tries to hide and repress her sexuality, her body once again triumphs over socially sanctioned moral conduct and restrictions imposed on a widow. She gives in to her bodily urges and gets involved physically with her tenant. But at this point, one finds her mind gripped by feelings of guilt and shame. In her attempts to secretly enter her tenant, Raman’s room and her vigorous bathing and scrubbing after each sexual encounter, she reveals the powerful conflict going on within her between her instincts and consciousness of moral canons. She feels torn between the austere behaviour expected from a widow and the rhythms of her body. A similar consequence of repression of natural urges is also noticeable in the case of Devi in *In the Country of Deceit*. Initially, she is not inclined to acknowledge the demands of her body. That’s why, when Ashok proposes her, the overwhelming urges of the body compel her to enter a relationship with him. On the other hand, her moral self resists this relationship with a married man.

Both Manjari and Devi experience this feeling of guilt as they try and seek the fulfilment of their needs as women outside the socially sanctioned relationship in marriage. But these women try to overcome the barriers of social codes and constructs which permit a woman to enjoy physical pleasures only within marriage. Through the examples of these women, Deshpande seems to suggest that bodily demands see no right or wrong and they defy all logical arguments when they seek their fulfilment. But at the same time, one’s moral and social self experiences feelings of guilt and shame for going against the expectations of the society.

If Manjari and Devi are striking examples of consequences of repressed sexuality, then Akka’s husband in *Roots and Shadows* and Mira’s husband in *A Binding Vine* are victims of overassertion of sexuality. For both these men physical pleasure becomes an obsession. The sexual drives in their cases are so overpowering that they indulge in repeated acts of sexual violence against their wives, showing complete indifference to their feelings and emotions. They are so much possessed by sexual urge that they do not even appears to have any feelings of guilt or remorse. Here, Deshpande suggests that these men represent those of the males who are rendered callous towards women by their upbringing in the code of manliness. In the
process, a woman for them gets reduced to a mere object, denying her the right to fulfilment of the need of her body at her own terms.

What seems to characterise her treatment of the libidinous drives and their conflict with the moral consciousness of her individuals is the fact that she nowhere reveals tendencies of excessive indulgence in the descriptions of sexual acts and desires. On the contrary, she brings out this reality of human life in its full force without any sign of vulgarity or coarseness.

Apart from body and bodily urges, Deshpande also brings out the governing and manipulating power of one’s own psyche. She lays bare the psychological compulsions and complexities of both men and women and often presents her individuals as victims of their own psyche. She shows how at times the unconscious thoughts, feelings and emotions take control of a person. Various feelings of fear, guilt, envy, anger, frustration etc. tend to dictate the responses of an individual. For instance, in Saru’s case in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the feelings of hostility towards her mother tend to become the most powerful factor controlling her mind and decisions. Her decisions like studying in a medical college and marrying a man of her choice can be seen as reactions to her mother’s gender-biased attitude.

Deshpande also offers insightful depictions of the power of the state of obsession in conditioning one’s attitude towards self and others. She reveals a remarkable understanding of the tensions and torments an individual suffers, particularly when conflict is between one’s physical passions and his/her fixation with the idea of the purity of body. Vasu in *Moving On*, for instance, is obsessed with the idea of austerity and purity of body which impedes her coming to terms with her physical self.

Apart from one’s unconscious thoughts and pressures, one’s memories of past also tend to govern his/her present as well as future actions. Past experiences get stored up in the mind in the form of memories and they may continue to control and manipulate the individual’s behaviour with a kind of invisible hand. Deshpande presents this working of memory in one’s life through a number of her characters. For example, in *A Matter of Time*, Gopal’s actions in the present can be better analysed and understood when seen in relation to the past in his memory. Gopal’s walking out on Sumi can be attributed to his childhood experiences. He is haunted
by feelings of shame and embarrassment when he recollects that his father had married the widow of his own brother. He feels strongly that his father has committed a sin by entering into an unholy relationship with his own sister-in-law. Later, to his bewilderment, he discovers that his sister and he have different fathers. This revelation adds insult to his injury and he tends to conclude that “all human ties are only a masquerade”(p.52). It is these feelings of disillusionment and emptiness which get stored in his unconscious and become a reason for his walking out on his wife. Through this character, Deshpande underlines the fact that past experiences get imprinted on our psyche so deeply that despite conscious efforts, it is almost impossible to erase them. They keep on guiding and governing the present as well as future responses and reactions of an individual. By this attempt to probe the inner recesses of the mind of her characters, she offers a convincing and logical cause for their otherwise inexplicable actions.

Deshpande tends to expand the range and scope of this conflict by extending it from within an individual to the realm of one’s social existence. She is a writer who dramatises a dialectical relationship between an individual and his environment. She underlines the effect of various social constructs like family, marriage, customs, religions and traditions as constraining powers over an individual. Society seeks to condition the actions and behaviours of both men and women through role allocations and established norms and patterns of behaviours. She reveals the effects of socialisation where a man is taught to be dominant and assertive and a woman is conditioned to be subservient and passive. This is exemplified through women like Vanitamami, Saptagiri Ajji and Vimala in That Long Silence and through men like Shripati in A Matter of Time. At the same time, individuals with a heightened sense of self, like Jaya and Indu, experience a constant frustration and anxiety when he/she finds himself/herself pitted against the social forces. On the one hand are their own dreams and aspirations and on the other are the oppressive agencies of society.

Among various institutions created by patriarchy, which tend to control an individual, the writer believes that the most prominent one is the institution of marriage. It gives authority to a man to assume complete control over the identity of his wife. A woman is expected to give up her identity and live as a shadow of her husband. For instance, Indu, the protagonist of the novel Roots and Shadows, is
shown submitting to the demands and dictates of her husband. Jaya in *That Long Silence* also has to cast herself in the mould of a traditional wife for whom her husband is a “sheltering tree” (p.32). Getting married and raising a family are considered the only motives of the existence of a woman. Her failure to do so brings humiliation and shatters her self-confidence. Through Mini’s character in *Roots and Shadows*, Deshpande succinctly presents the mental trauma of a girl who for some reasons is not able to get married.

Through the institution of marriage the society exerts its influence not only on woman but also on a man. He too feels immense pressure of the social forces to cast himself according to the prescribed image of a man. His failure to do so renders him impotent and he invites insult from the society for being unable to perform his part. This is clearly evident through Manu’s character in *The Dark Hold No Terrors*, who becomes schizophrenic when he realises that he only plays a second-fiddle to his wife.

Deshpande also highlights the fact that feelings of chauvinism ingrained in men are further manifested in male behaviour when they expect women to play only a secondary role both in the family sphere as well as in professional fields. For instance, we find that in *The Binding Vine*, a minor poet like Venu discourages Mira’s efforts at writing poetry and thus acts as a deterrent to the artist in her. His male ego and acute consciousness of role allocations for women become evident when he is blatant in advising Mira to confine herself to her defined territory of household chores.

Shashi Deshpande has also drawn attention to the phenomenon of economic forces which provide a basis for social structures and thus play a vital role in conditioning the consciousness, attitudes and behaviours of her men and women. Traditionally, the control over economic means has been in the hands of males and women have been dispossessed of economic power. This dependence of women on man to satisfy even their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter contributes a great deal to their disempowerment forcing them into a state of servility and subjugation. The inability of women like Kalyani in *A Matter of Time* and Narmada Atya in *Roots and Shadows* to liberate themselves from the stranglehold of constricting and restraining powers can also be attributed to their financial dependency on others. On
the other hand, modern women like Urmī in *The Binding Vine*, Manjari in *Moving On* and Devī in *In the Country of Deceit* are able to take control of their lives, to some extent, only because they are self-reliant in matters of money.

Thus, Deshpande has depicted in a precise and accurate manner the role played by social and economic interactions and constructs in determining an individual’s behaviours and attitudes. This further deepens the pattern of cause and effect in the delineation of the conflict of individuals with the factors and forces of the objective world which seek to control them.

Further expanding the range and scope of this element of conflict, Deshpande extends it from the realm of social milieu to the world of some incomprehensible, strange and mysterious powers beyond human comprehension. She often depicts the drama of human life being acted out on the stage set largely by some unknown power which can be termed as God or fate or mere chance. She shows some of her characters contending against these invisible forces beyond their comprehension and control. Such men and women are often seen inclined to work in one direction, but their fate appears to will otherwise.

These forces can often be seen casting their long shadows in the form of situations and events and thus influence the thoughts, decisions and actions of an individual in complex ways. Of all the different ways in which fate tends to control one’s life, the phenomenon of death appears to be the biggest one in which it manipulates an individual. Deshpande has frequently presented in her novels the tragic drama created by death. She has faithfully revealed the feelings of despair, gloom, confusion and isolation which follow the death of a close one. For instance, the repercussions of Dhruva’s death in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* are ever present in the lives of both his mother and his sister, Saru. His mother’s hostility for Saru increases and she even accuses her for being responsible for his death. On the other hand, Saru is never able to liberate herself from the hold of this incident. The feelings of guilt associated with it continue to haunt her for a long time. Jaya’s course of life in *That Long Silence* also takes a u-turn after her father’s death. Also, the death of Madhu’s only child in *Small Remedies* shatters her life to pieces and further embitters her relationship with her husband.
The working of cruel designs of fate are also perceptible in many other ways. Through certain chance happenings like the disappearance of Kalyani’s son in *A Matter of Time*, one’s destiny can be seen to be taking hold of his/her life. Kalyani’s marital life is destroyed after this incident and her husband is never able to recover his mental poise. It not only affects Shripati’s relationship with Kalyani but also his relationship with his daughters.

It also emerges from this study that by portraying her characters as pitted against some invisible cosmic powers, society and against themselves, Deshpande skillfully blends the theme of ancient Greek mythology, where an individual is in constant struggle against the supernatural powers, with the modernistic philosophy wherein man is depicted in conflict with his own self. Her art of rendering of tensions and turmoils of common, ordinary people, attains higher and nobler dimensions when analysed from this perspective. It adds a philosophical and social depth along with the emotional reverberations it generates in the reader. This fusion of the ordinary with the extra-ordinary lends a comprehensive and wider perspective to her themes. Layers and layers of meanings get unfolded when we analyse her novels from this angle. Through the depiction of lives of ordinary middle-class people, her novels tends to present universal issues related to larger human predicament. Various forms of conflicts described in her novels give a real and truthful picture of human nature and complexities of life. Realism in her novels is not limited merely to a reliable and authentic representation of social norms and structures and the predicament of an individual situated in them, but by revealing the doubts, fears, guilts, aspirations residing in deep recesses of the psyche of her characters, she also imparts the elements of psychological realism to her novels. There is an effortless blending of the social with the psychological which expands the horizons of her novels.

The element of realism is further noticeable in Deshpande’s art of characterisation also. She presents life-like characters who touch the reader at social, physical, intellectual, moral, emotional and imaginative levels. Moreover, her portraits are not a mere description of the physical features and appearances but the writer gives a truthful picture of a wide range of emotions and feelings, desires and aspirations and doubts and uncertainties characterising his/her psyche. The
conflicting psychological state of characters like that of Gopal in *A Matter of Time* and Devi in *In the Country of Deceit* leaves a remarkable impression on the reader’s mind enabling him/her, at the same time, to fully comprehend the complex mental make-up of these individuals.

Deshpande deals with a wide range of men and women experiencing a conflict with outer and/or inner forces. But only those characters who are equipped with an awakened sense of self and have the will, potential, stamina and capacity to break the constricting hold of deterministic forces emerge as central figures in her novels. While some of them are able to assert their freedom of will at the level of decision-making only, there are others like Sumi and Madhu who reach the next stage of actualization of self where they are able to translate their thoughts into actions. They emerge as fully developed and multifaceted personalities who show a growth from ignorance to knowledge. Deshpande also presents the free will of her protagonists, transcending the sphere of personal desires and satisfaction to a realm of social good and welfare. They often display the power of their will working on a larger scale. Along with the fulfilment of self, they also work towards the benefit of the society at large. Urmi in *The Binding Vine* and Leela in *Small Remedies* infuse hope in other people’s life with their will and strength.

On the other hand, there are a large number of characters like Mohan’s mother and Vimala in *That Long Silence* or Manu in *The Dark Hold No Terrors* who helplessly submit to the controlling circumstances in life. Such men and women tend to remain only as minor characters and are given comparatively lesser space in the scheme of her novels. These individuals remain static as they are deficient in their ability to think rationally and critically. Deshpande doesn’t seem to have much sympathy for such weak characters.

Thus her art of characterisation tends to create an affirmative impact on her readers. It infuses them with an element of hope and a belief in one’s own power to overcome the challenges in life. Deshpande’s vision of life also gets clearly revealed in the process. The way she dramatises her character’s growth from self–abnegation to self-assertion testifies to her faith in the importance of making efforts on the part of an individual in order to improve one’s life. Her emphasis on the ability of humans to assert themselves gains more weight and depth and her vision
tends to broaden as one moves from one novel to another in chronological order. While the protagonists in her earlier novels show the inner resources of courage and self-confidence in their decision to face the cramping and controlling agencies, the central figures in her recent novels show the ability to materialise their decisions into actions. This movement marks a mature, refined and practical understanding of life acquired through time and experience. Her vision of life appears to be essentially optimistic.

This tension and struggle between determining forces on the one hand and the human will on the other not only gives new insights into her art of characterisation and her vision of life but also appears to energise the plots of her novels. It introduces the element of drama and tension beneath the seemingly simple and lyrical plot construction of her novels. Also these contradictory elements are so effortlessly incorporated that the plot moves smoothly without any impediments in the flow of events presented in the novel. This conflict also acts as a unifying thread in her novels and puts various incidents in proper perspective. These philosophical concepts are aesthetically interwoven with the structure of her novels by employing various devices like imagery, symbols, irony etc enhancing the beauty and richness of her novel, making their reading a delectable and fulfilling experience at various levels – emotional, intellectual, moral, philosophical and even spiritual.

Though the purpose of the present study has not certainly been to resolve the problem of determinism and free will, it does shed light on some of the very important features of Deshpande’s mind and art, enabling us to arrive at a comprehensive, insightful and balanced understanding of her oeuvre. It clearly indicates that Deshpande, avoiding all rigidities, polarities and extremities, takes the in-between view of these antithetical elements. She seems to believe that though one’s life is sketched out, but it can be slightly altered with each choice. She seems to espouse what Jawahar Lal Nehru said: “Life is both. Life is like a game of cards. You have no control over the hand that deals you. That corresponds to determinism; the way you play the cards corresponds to free will.”

In agreeing to the dominance of forces, within and without, over an individual, Deshpande presents a glimpse of a real practical world, where an individual so often feels cowed down by overpowering forces. But the idea that our
lives are controlled by external and internal factors give a rather depressing picture of life. That’s why, Deshpande energises her novels with hope and happiness by showing her characters in control of their thoughts and actions. She appears to put faith in a one’s rational, moral and ethical self but doesn’t unnecessarily glorify an individual’s capabilities. The words of Vijay Tendukar, thus seem to sum up Deshpande’s point of view as well: “Man surrenders to his fate. All animals are like that. But man alone feels to give a fight against fate. And he’ll give a fight. But it is a fight. But it is true that there’s something like determinism in man’s life. But men won’t surrender to those forces. Rather they would have an encounter with them. That’s why human species has still survived.”

NOTES
